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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000795

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E AND DS/IP/AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/09/2014

TAGS: PGOV ELAB ECON EINV CASC ASEC DJ

SUBJECT: HIRING FOR DORALEH PORT AND FREE ZONE SPARK LOCAL PROTESTS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Protests by residents of the Afar neighborhood of Arhiba blocked Rue d'Arta for several hours on 8 June 2004. The protests were sparked by information that led the residents to believe that the workforce hired by Dubai Ports International to construct and run the Doraleh Port Facility would be primarily expatriates and not Djiboutians.

¶12. (C) Another factor that led to the protests was the fear of discrimination against Afars in the hiring process for the new port. (Note: According to Econ FSN, Afars sense that national hiring practices have been discriminatory towards them and that a hiring quota similar to the allocation in place at the National Assembly should be extended to all sectors of government and the economy. End Note.) Post's source at the Ministry of Justice indicates that Afar residents of Arhiba are demanding an agreement with the Government of Djibouti that all future hiring for the Doraleh Port Facility and the Djibouti Free Zone should guarantee a certain number of jobs to Afars.

¶13. (C) The protests, largely street demonstrations, were broken up by the police, but only after negotiations. According to a police source, the units dispatched to the protests were instructed to make no arrests, use no violent force, and to negotiate a peaceful end. These instructions are apparently the result of bad blood between the residents of Arhiba and the police, due to a particularly violent clash with Arhiba residents in the early nineties. The police successfully negotiated an end to the protest on the terms that the residents would get the chance to meet with the Prime Minister and discuss their demand for a quota. The same source said that the Arhiba residents will prepare a list of all Afar workers and their skill level, which will be given to the government. The meeting with the Prime Minister is scheduled for the morning of 9 June. Post will follow-up on the developments from this meeting.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: Post cannot confirm whether the work force hired for Doraleh Port Facility will be majority expatriate or not. A meeting with the Doraleh construction supervisor revealed that of the nearly 2,000 employees to be hired, only 250-300 would be Djiboutian. This number was based on their assessment on the level of skilled workers present in Djibouti. However, in a meeting with Abdourahman Boreh, the main Djiboutian force behind the Doraleh project, Ambassador was told that there would be a majority of Djiboutians hired and only those skills not present in Djibouti would be brought in from Dubai.

¶15. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The lack of skilled workers in Djibouti's workforce is the key roadblock to most foreign investment. Without a strong surge in Djibouti's entrepreneurial spirit and a push to provide vocational training to the population, the government will not be able to provide Djiboutians the volume of job opportunities they seek.

¶16. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: RSO and U.S. Military Force Protection officers have been closely monitoring this protest. Presently, there are no indications that the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Military Base or any of its personnel are at risk. Although tensions are high among protesters and some vandalism has occurred in the form of rock throwing and burning tires, the crowds have stayed within the area of protest. Americans have been advised to avoid those areas in which the protesters gather until the demonstrations have subsided. END COMMENT.

RAGSDALE